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Expropriated from the Hereafter: The Fate of the Landless in the Southern Highlands of Madagascar

SANDRA EVERS

During the period following the abolition of slavery by the French colonial government in 1896, the Southern Highlands of Madagascar was settled by ex-slaves. These early settlers constructed a foundation myth of themselves as tompon-tany, or 'masters of the land', a discourse not only equating land with tombs, kinship and ancestors, but also coupled with a skilful deployment of 'Malagasy customs'. In order to exclude later migrants who also wanted to settle, the 'masters of the land' attempted to establish control over holdings in the area. To this end, and to reinforce their own legitimacy as landholders, the tompon-tany labelled subsequent migrants andevo ('slave' or of 'slave descent') who – as a tombless people – have no rights to land. Because they have neither tombs nor ancestors, the landless andevo are socially ostracised and economically marginalised. As an 'impure people', they are not entitled to a place in the hereafter.

INTRODUCTION

Although not frequently seen as such, Madagascar – a large island in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Southern Africa – accurately embodies many of the economic and social problems currently on display in Africa itself, and for much the same reasons. French colonial rule ended in 1960, when Madagascar gained independence. The military seized power in the

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1970s, but economic growth did not materialise, and in the early 1980s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed a 'structural adjustment' programme (= *laissez faire* + increasing impoverishment).¹ President Ravalomanana, a millionaire businessman, is currently pursuing free market 'reforms', of which he is an enthusiast.

The net result of these developments can be summarised in a simple, yet eloquent statistic.² Madagascar ranked among the countries with the lowest GDP per capita in the world (US\$251 in 1997). The total population of Madagascar in 1993 was 12.2 million. Given the annual growth rate of 2.8 per cent, the population of Madagascar would double in a quarter of a century.³ By the early 1990s, about 70 per cent of the population lived under the poverty threshold as compared with 39 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa and 32 per cent for all developing countries [*World Bank*, 1996, *International Monetary Fund*, 1997].

As elsewhere in the so-called Third World, therefore, the result of applying these policies in Madagascar has been an increase in poverty, migration, competition for land, and changes in the rural labour regime. Some three quarters of the population are engaged in agriculture, which – together with livestock and forestry – accounts for 32 per cent of GDP.⁴ The economic growth rate in the early years of the new millennium was only 0.4 per cent per annum, and with a yearly demographic increase of nearly three per cent, per capita incomes declined. Not only is youth unemployment widespread, but for those with jobs the situation is little better: the monthly minimum wage – an aspiration in most cases – of no more than US\$30 is insufficient for the maintenance of a working family, and must therefore be supplemented by income from subsistence agriculture [*World Bank*, 2006].

The population movement within Madagascar, the pressure on land in the Southern Highlands, and the defensive ideological posture of the rural inhabitants there cannot but be seen in part as an effect of this economic situation. The latter provides a clue to the socio-economic phenomena outlined here: on the one hand, migration toward the research region between Ambalavao and Ankaramena in the extreme south of the highlands (see Figure 1) by those confronted with declining incomes elsewhere, in search of better livelihood prospects, and on the other the attempt by the rural population in that area to maintain control over land rights that might otherwise be claimed by these 'outsiders'. In other words, the IMF 'structural adjustment' programme is to some degree responsible for both the fact of and the form taken by the present conflict over this resource in the Southern Highlands of Madagascar.

The presentation which follows is divided into five sections, the first of which looks at how those landholders who refer to themselves as *tompon-tany* justified their position in the hierarchy, and the corresponding social

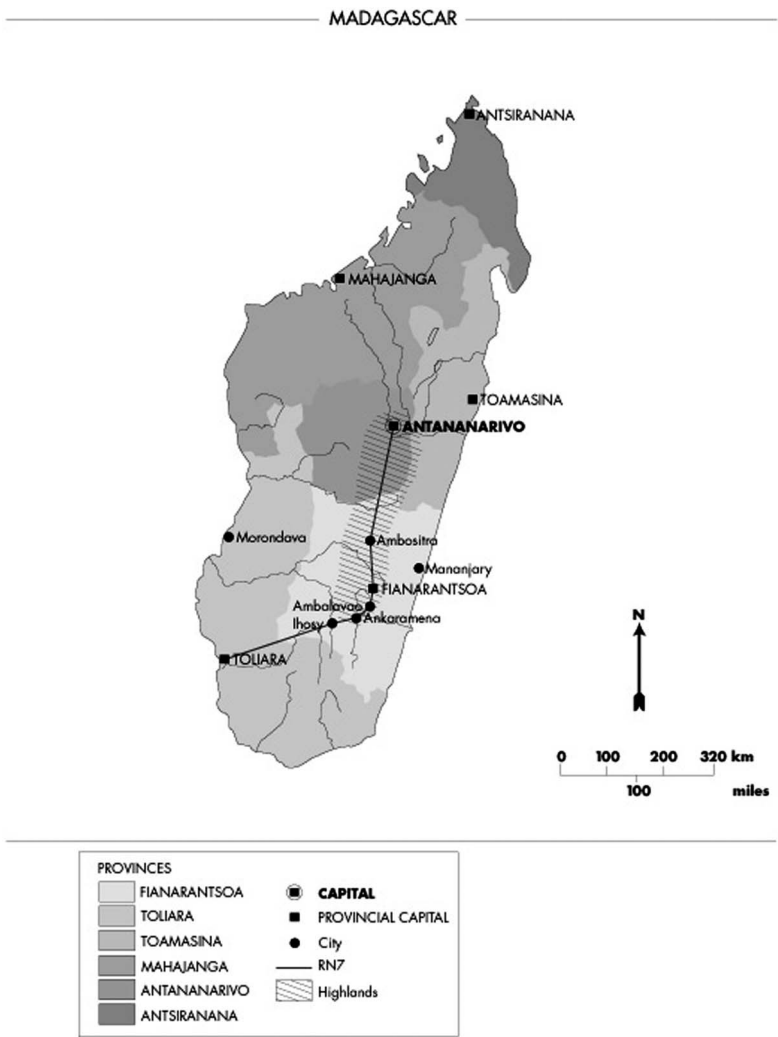


FIGURE 1: MAP OF MADAGASCAR

marginalisation and exclusion of a particular group of non-landholding migrants called *andevo* ('slave' or of 'slave descent'). How this in turn licensed the prevailing system of tenancy is examined in the second section, while the third considers the way in which *andevo* tenants with usufruct rights were replaced by landless migrants with none. This process of economic restructuring is linked in the fourth section to religious discourse about

funerals, tombs and ancestors, and in the fifth to witchcraft accusations. The connection between the struggle to protect property rights and current developments in Madagascar is explored in the conclusion.

LAND, TOMBS, AND THE CREATION OF INEQUALITY

Over a ten year period (1989–99), participant/observation fieldwork research was conducted among the Betsileo people who inhabit the zone between Ambalavao and Ankaramena in the Southern Highlands of Madagascar. Topographically, the region is a hilly area straddling the highlands and the arid semi-desert flatlands of the South.⁵ Prior to the mid-1960s, settlement and acquisition of land were still relatively easy in the arid zone between Ambalavao and Ankaramena. The mere occupation of land gave settlers the opportunity to accede to the status of *tompon-tany* or ‘masters of the land’.⁶ For both the Merina and Betsileo, living respectively in the Northern and Southern Highlands, possession of land and a family tomb are markers of family origin in a particular region [Bloch, 1971: 106–8].⁷

Accordingly, this initial wave of migrants ‘became’ *tompon-tany* simply by building a family tomb on their land, thereby establishing rights to such holdings by conferring upon them the status of ancestral land.⁸ These settlers currently form the group which controls access to land. They claim either commoner (*olompotsy*) or even noble (*hova* or *andriana*) origins. Based on reports of slave settlement in the *Archives d’Outre Mer*, however, it appears more likely that this migrant group is of slave descent.⁹ It was increasingly clear, however, that landholding status derived not so much from *tompon-tany* free origin as from legitimisation by virtue of being the site of a tomb.

In 1967 the *tompon-tany* consolidated their position as controlling landholders at a meeting in the village of Marovato, dividing amongst themselves all remaining unclaimed land.¹⁰ They also agreed henceforth not to sell land to third parties, but only to lease it. This amounted to nothing less than a de facto exclusion of later migrants (*mpiavy*) from *tompon-tany* ranks. This meeting was obviously a crucial turn in the history of the region. Although not backed by the state (Madagascar lacked a working centralised land registry system), one could argue that the 1967 meeting inaugurated a land registry system, albeit one recorded orally. Since the *tompon-tany* had conceived general consensus on land divisions and their borders, it had local legitimacy. From the angle of a French civil law analysis, there is no doubt that *tompon-tany* enjoyed the three components attributed to land ownership in the civil law: *usus*, *fructus* and *abusus*.

The *tompon-tany* village councils administer settlement and land lease policies in the region. In principle, these original settlers who are now landholders do not allow non-Betsileo to live in their villages, and even

Betsileo migrants are only admitted after rigorous scrutiny.¹¹ Every Betsileo migrant who wishes to live in Marovato¹² has first to report to the members of the *tompon-tany* village council.¹³ This council unites the heads of the five largest *tompon-tany* families of Marovato. They always demand to know where the applicant's ancestral land and family tomb are located. Their aim is to establish the origins of every new-comer. Any migrant who is vague about his descent is presumed by the *tompon-tany* to be of slave origin (*andevo*),¹⁴ since all free-born persons in the highlands have ancestral land and a family tomb in their native region. *Tompon-tany* refer to Betsileo who cannot name their ancestral homeland as people who do 'not have a history' (*tsy misy tantara*) or have 'lost their history' (*very tantara*). This amounts to an automatic cause of marginalisation, as their past has given them no status or possible claim to land.¹⁵

Ideological Marginalisation of the Landless

Social exclusion of the 'impure people' (*olona maloto*) thus marginalised both locationally and ideologically is expressed by landholding villagers in terms of a fear they have of being polluted by the landless *andevo*. Not only do they feel superior to them, they also keep a great physical distance from inhabitants of the Western Marovato periphery. Villagers who come into contact with *andevo* immediately become themselves 'impure'. However, there can be no doubt that the principle of keeping at a 'safe' distance from *andevo* is sometimes best honoured in the breach, as demonstrated by the seven mixed marriages in Marovato.¹⁶

Anyone entering into marriage with an *andevo* is, and remains, polluted until the marriage is dissolved. Children born into these marriages are also considered 'impure'. This form of pollution cannot be cleansed, as the villagers view it as an impurity of the blood (*ra*). For the parent of free descent, this already is sufficient reason to end the marriage, although a more fatal consequence decides the issue. Upon their death, the 'impure' children and *andevo* wife/husband cannot be placed in the tomb of the free descent parent. Therefore, when a man is of free descent, his *andevo* wife and children may not be buried in his family tomb. Informants explained that this means that they cannot be together as a family in the hereafter. This form of exclusion constitutes a highly effective tool used by people with tombs to ward off 'impure people'.

Internalisation of the *andevo* label is a significant component of social relations in Marovato. It is most poignantly demonstrated by the *andevo* bowing to passing *tompon-tany* nobility, and in their self-imposed adherence to rules of avoidance determined by 'pure people'. According to the *tompon-tany*, the *andevo* deviate from the norms of 'Malagasy custom' (*fomba gasy*), which they say only serves to confirm their inferior status. One might well

wonder why the *andevo* accept such living conditions and daily humiliation? And secondly, why would they not unite to resist the *tompon-tany*? Were they not aware of the Malagasy history of agrarian struggles?¹⁷

The observation that *tompon-tany* and the *andevo* share the same world-view is only part of the answer to this enigma. It was striking how *andevo* never lost an opportunity to openly express their lack of worth, a condition brought on by having no ancestors.¹⁸ They felt a repugnance for their *andevo* neighbours equal to their own negative self-image. Neither did they associate with each other, their point of reference being the *tompon-tany*. Naturally, some *andevo* used their marginalised status as outsiders to gain a useful skill and make money, but the threat of a landless *andevo* making good, owning land and challenging the existing order was negligible during the research period. When asked whether the *tompon-tany* could also be of slave descent, they dismissed the query as irrelevant. Since the *tompon-tany* now possessed tombs and ancestors, their current status was ipso facto legitimised. The process of exclusion is accordingly an ideology to which both 'those above' and 'those below' subscribe.

THE ECONOMICS OF SOCIAL MARGINALISATION

Tompon-tany social domination is coupled with economic control over migrants. This subordinate link is created through dependence of newcomers upon *tompon-tany* families for access to land. Upon arrival, all migrants entered into a tenancy agreement with the *tompon-tany*, whereby 'masters of the land' lease holdings to incoming migrants in exchange for the provision by the latter of labour-rent. In this way the *tompon-tany* reinforce their superior social status over the landless by controlling access to the means of production, and with it the capacity of migrants to eke out subsistence.

The inhabitants of Marovato practice both agriculture and livestock breeding. Although cattle are important as status symbols and transferable repositories of wealth, economic life in the village revolves principally around the production of rice, manioc, maize and vegetables. The *tompon-tany* only cultivate one-third of their land. The rest lies fallow or is leased out to tenants, an arrangement justified in terms of rotating land currently in use. Each year, just before the rainy season starts, villagers burn their land, a practice they refer to as *tavy*. This they do to prepare the new agricultural season, to set aside fallow land for a period of years, or as a means of asserting uninterrupted 'ownership'.

In Madagascar, the Betsileo have the reputation of principally being rice-cultivators. This is certainly true with respect to the Northern Betsileo. From Ambositra to Ambalavao (see Figure 1), the landscape is dominated by rice-paddies. However, further south, the rice paddies give way to hills which

have undergone serious erosion, thereby making rice cultivation difficult or impossible. Inhabitants of the region between Ambalavao and Ankaramena constantly complain that the rainy season, which extends from November to March, has been commencing much later in recent years. They nevertheless have continued to cultivate rice at the Zomandao riverbanks, although production has steadily declined.

Land suited for rice cultivation is at a premium, and before the 1967 meeting a number of disputes broke out over land involving *tompon-tany* families. Despite the reported consensus achieved during the 1967 gathering, these conflicts still take place today. The other source of disputes arises within *tompon-tany* families, usually between brothers contesting their father's legacy. These disputes over land are played out at the local level, and involve 'traditional healers' (*ombiasy*) who in case of unresolved conflict also provide assistance in the field of sorcery or even actual poisonings.

Tompon-tany household heads use proximity of social relations as their primary criterion in determining the allocation of land under their control. The household head manages both the ancestral family land (*tanin-drazana*) and the cultivated area. Ancestral land encompasses the plots where the parental house and the family tomb are located, parcels that may not be divided and are jealously protected by the *tompon-tany* family head. Farmland is divided more or less equally between him and his brothers. They either cultivate it in conjunction with their children or lease it out to other relatives. When sons marry, parents bestow farmland as a gift to the newly-weds. Daughters do not enjoy the same privilege, as they become part of the economic unit of the family they marry into.

There are exceptions. If a prospective bride intends to remain in the region, her parents may grant her usufruct rights over holdings they control if the family of the groom does not itself have sufficient land. This may also occur when a *tompon-tany* daughter marries a migrant. But generally the inheritance of land passes through the male line, a system that fragments the family holdings. The village leader, Rafidy Andriana of Marovato, recognised this as problematic: 'I have to oversee the fair division of land in my family. Every generation, we have to divide it between more people. I can hardly control it. This is why my father advised me to take as much land as possible, even if we cannot cultivate it. All *tompon-tany* families did this, since there was lots of land at the time. Now we use this land to practise *tavy* and to earn money by leasing it out to migrants.'

Migrants as Tenants

None of the *andevo* tenants cultivates rice land. As a *tompon-tany* family head explained: 'The rice fields we need ourselves. And it never is a good idea to give the best away to people you do not even know.' This statement is

not insignificant, as it indicates that the deliberate leasing of poor quality land is no accident of marketplace economics but an instrument of socio-economic policy to prevent migrants, with whom *tompon-tany* share no social bond, from gaining access to good land and thus the possibility of doing well enough to become economically independent. This is particularly true for the *andevo* of Western Marovato.¹⁹ *Andevo* land is for the most part located near the northern Ifaha mountain range, at distances of 1–5 km from the village. *Andevo* and mixed *andevo*/free descent households cultivate an average of 0.10 hectare per person, compared with the average per capita allocation for *tompon-tany* families of 0.38 hectare.

Tenancy agreements concluded with *tompon-tany* carry over from one generation to the next. As part of this arrangement, children from tenant households inherit not only usufruct rights from their parents, but also any debts that have accumulated. Such inherited debt is often more than the children can repay; migrants arrive with few resources, and their economic conditions scarcely improve as time goes on. The dream of quick riches based on the cultivation of manioc crops quickly fades.

When taking up a tenancy, migrants are unable to meet the costs of cultivation, and the *tompon-tany* postpone payment until after first harvest. Further credits are needed just to seed the land. Here again, the *tompon-tany* are ready to provide loans, so any potential harvest profits are mortgaged well in advance. The cycle immediately renews itself. As soon as one production season ends, the cultivators have to invest in the next by buying new seeds and fertilisers, which of course are supplied by the *tompon-tany*. On this point, the ‘master of land’ Rafidy Andriana observed: ‘All migrants owe us debts, especially those in Western Marovato. You see they need us; what would they become without us?’ Thus, these leases, despite being oral agreements which are not formally ratified, are key instruments used by the *tompon-tany* to create and reproduce a structure of economic dependence.

Under the lease agreement, a *tompon-tany* retains control of the land and holds certain rights over his tenants. He can, for example, demand labour during harvest time, since in effect the *andevo* provide a *tompon-tany* with a permanent workforce throughout the year. Often, *andevo* are called upon to do the more demeaning and dirty tasks such as cleaning cattle corrals and digging holes for foundations of *tompon-tany* houses. As for living conditions in the *andevo* quarter, West Marovato seems materially impoverished. The huts are all of poor quality and, contrary to the ‘masters of land’, the *andevo* possess little or no livestock or farming equipment. In short, the social exclusion of the *andevo* contradicts the centrality of their economic role in community life.

The *tompon-tany* regularly referred to socio-economic relations and *fomba gasy* as a stable and part of a timeless system, despite the fact that socio-economic relations were constantly evolving. Notwithstanding the recent

provenance of categories such as *andevo* and *andriana*, such socio-economic identities possess an a-historical presence in the discourse of the Betsileo, where they legitimise and perpetuate the inferior status of the *andevo*. This was confirmed by Rafidy Andriana, who stressed that this is how *andevo* are supposed to be treated and how the *tompon-tany* have to consolidate their position in the village. That is what his ancestors expected from him and constitutes part of an unchanging tradition. As he stated during a late 1992 interview: 'My ancestors see to it that I follow the Malagasy customs. When I am dead myself, I will see to it that my children will also live according to the Malagasy customs.'²⁰

CHANGES IN PRODUCTION RELATIONS, 1992–96

In 1992 the *tompon-tany* still employed no labour from outside the village. After that point, however, they repossessed tenancies, evicted tenants, and farmed their land directly using migrant workers residing in the village. The principal change which had occurred during the four-year period (1992–96) preceding the second research phase was brought on by the arrival of landless migrant labourers (*mpikarama*) and the corresponding decline of the *andevo* as an economic grouping.²¹ Designated 'impure' or 'dirty people' by the *tompon-tany*, these migrants displayed social behaviour consistent with their economic subordination, toiling for little or no remuneration.

Landless migrants are family members, coming principally from the wives' side of the *tompon-tany* village leaders. They explain their arrival by pointing to the lack of land in their own native villages around Ambalavao and Fianarantsoa. Some arrived in Marovato on their own initiative, while others came at the invitation of the *tompon-tany*. Significantly, production relations connecting employer and worker are projected in terms of kinship links and ideology.

Great emphasis is placed by both *tompon-tany* and landless migrants on family solidarity (*fiavanana*) between them. When asked who their parents (*ray aman-dreny*) are, such workers refer to the *tompon-tany* household head and his spouse.²² This kinship categorisation is reciprocated, since a *tompon-tany* household head calls his migrant labourers sons (*zanakalahy*) and daughters (*zanakavavy*) and states that he treats them as he would his own children. He provides migrants with medicine when they are ill, and contributes to the bridewealth payment when male workers get married. In reality, however, all landless migrants were heavily indebted to the *tompon-tany* as a result of these 'services'. They were clearly workers and not family members. This is evident from the fact that when they die, landless migrants are not interred in the *tompon-tany* tombs but transported for burial in their natal villages.

Tenants Replaced by Landless Migrants

By 1996, however, the *tompon-tany* had repossessed their leased land from the *andevo* who were their tenants, and from whom labour-rent was demanded at harvest time. Tenants were evicted by *tompon-tany*, who henceforth employed newly arrived landless labourers with no usufruct right to land they cultivated. This was repeatedly justified by *tompon-tany* rhetoric on how lazy and useless the *andevo* were and that therefore it was decided to evict them altogether.²³ In reality, 31 *andevo* continued living in Marovato, arguing that they had nowhere else to go. No longer tenants, these *andevo* survived either by means of petty theft of field crops or by sending their sons to Ambalavao and Fianarantsoa in search for work.²⁴ Despite their eviction, they retained their importance as a cultural category. First, as a tombless and 'impure' people, and second as a negative reference group, the 'other' of *tompon-tany* cultural values. As such, the image of the *andevo* circulating in discourse continued to be equated with infertility, illness, death and other misfortune.

This in turn raises two questions. Even after being replaced in the agrarian labour process by landless migrants without usufruct rights, why would *andevo* ex-tenants continue to occupy such a central place in *tompon-tany* discourse, *fomba gasy* and mythology? And as importantly, why would the *andevo* themselves not only accept the negative way they were categorised in this discourse but also assume the role of the principal actors in its perpetuation?

The answer to the first question is relatively unproblematic; in the kind of situation outlined here, the ideological struggle over land that is not formally owned takes the form of the religious discourse. For the *tompon-tany*, therefore, tombs/ancestors are a way of establishing or reproducing control over the land, and securing the exclusion of labourers – either tenants with usufruct rights or landless workers without them – who might either set up on their own in the vicinity or challenge existing property relations. Because they do not have tombs or ancestors, therefore, labourers are de facto denied property rights, a discourse that serves to consolidate and reaffirm the power of the *tompon-tany* is one reproduced by the latter.

The answer to the second question is more complex, and entailed research into funeral practices during 1996. Attempts to do this in 1992 were effectively blocked by village elders, who ordered the anthropologist to help the women with fetching water, cooking and other menial tasks, which prevented any comprehensive questioning during the four-day time span of a full-fledged funeral. By 1996, however, the village elders granted permission to converse with guests and even to sit with them for extended periods. They were now willing to answer questions in detail. Since the anthropologist had

learned to 'behave like a Betsileo',²⁵ the drudgery of the kitchen could be escaped and, more importantly, was deemed ready to hear about more complex cultural themes.²⁶ It had, in short, become possible to pursue this line of inquiry; the role of religious belief and practice in reproducing dominance and subordination, and why non-landholders subscribed to this discourse.

TOMBS, ANCESTORS AND INEQUALITY IN THE HEREAFTER

For the Betsileo, tombs represent family unity and the entrance to the hereafter [*Rajaonarimanana*, 1979: 182], and on a daily basis Marovato villagers refer to tombs in order to demonstrate their social status. At the same time, it is strictly taboo (*fady*) actually to point out the exact location of the tomb. When questioned about this, villagers generally respond by indicating its general direction, for example, by stating that the tomb is located to the northeast or north. Most tombs of the Marovato *tompon-tany* are located in the Northeastern Ifaha mountains, approximately 1 km to the north of the village. These *tompon-tany* tombs are generally constructed on the upper portions of their land, which coincides with the foothills of the Ifaha mountains. *Tompon-tany* land extends downwards from the tombs in the direction of the Zomandao river.²⁷

Funerals and 'Ancestralisation'

Having tombs is not the only prerequisite for admittance to the afterlife. Nor does one become an ancestor simply by dying. A proper funeral and its accompanying rituals are required. These can be divided into three phases, each of which plays a role in what might be described as the process of 'ancestralisation', or the conversion of a deceased person into an ancestor.²⁸ Funerals are the most crucial phase of the 'ancestralisation' process, of which two forms are followed by those who have tombs: a more elaborate *tompon-tany* ceremony, and the simpler ritual practised by landless migrants who have their tombs elsewhere.²⁹ Among *tompon-tany* families, funerals can last as long as four days, and generate anxiety lest some part of the ritual is performed incorrectly, thereby displeasing the ancestors.

The reason for this anxiety can best be understood in terms of an opposition between positive and negative 'life forces', as embodied in the concepts *hasina* and *hery*. Described by Delivré [1967: 167–84] as a form of energy innate to existence, references to *hasina* have been encountered by most of those conducting research in Madagascar, and also in the case of the Merina and Betsileo [*Bloch*, 1989: 46–88; *Delivré*, 1967; *Dubois*, 1938; *Edholm*, 1971].³⁰ Although it is regarded by those at the rural grassroots as positive and beneficial, it is also seen as containing destructive properties

[Kottak, 1980: 69, 212]. In the Marovato region, informants believe that the converse of *hasina* or positive (= benign) energy, is *hery* or negative (= destructive) energy. They assert that *hasina* can be transformed by ancestors and individuals into *hery* if they wish to express their discontent. Fertility, successful harvests, and good health are all ascribed to *hasina*, whereas *hery* is said to cause infertility, illness and death.³¹

Of particular significance is that Marovato villagers link the concept of *hasina* directly to the position occupied in the current social hierarchy. *Hasina* resides with and emanates from the ancestors, and its vehicle of transmission is the socio-political order. The *tompon-tany* household heads and traditional healers (*ombiasy*), as the most powerful inhabitants of the Marovato region, are said to possess the most *hasina*.³² They are considered to be closest to the ancestors, and their roles during rituals are a reflection of this proximity. Noble descent *tompon-tany* have more *hasina* than villagers of commoner descent.³³ By contrast, the landless *andevo*, who occupy the lowest position in the local hierarchy, possess the least *hasina*. This, combined with their presumed impurity, is the *tompon-tany* justification for excluding the *andevo* from their rituals.³⁴ *Tompon-tany* claim the mere presence of the *andevo* will anger the ancestors and bring misfortune.

The importance of funeral practices is that it is precisely in this context that a shift can occur, from positive to negative live force. Since the 'spirit of the deceased' encases positive energy, villagers believe that if funeral rites are not performed properly, the *hasina* of the deceased can change into *hery* because the spirit fails to enter the tomb. This is catastrophic, as this means that the 'spirit of the deceased' will get 'lost' (*very*) and can no longer join the ancestors. Villagers claim that it will then become frustrated and take revenge on living family members through the conversion of *hasina* into *hery*. The result, inevitably, will lead to infertility, illness and death within the family concerned.³⁵

Becoming 'lost' in this manner is the fate of the landless *andevo* dead, as they do not have tombs. Perhaps nothing illustrates the *andevo* position in the villages better than their funeral practices (see Appendix). Unlike the highly ritualised ceremony which accompanies the departure of *tompon-tany* for the next world, burial of the deceased *andevo* is accomplished hastily and under cover of night.³⁶ When an *andevo* died, burial followed within 24 hours. Those who died at night were buried before the following dawn. By then, the household of the deceased had resumed its daily activities. As *andevo* Ratsimbazafy said: 'It is like burying a dog'. The example is graphic and fitting, for the dog is a symbol of impurity for most Malagasy.³⁷

The negative attributes popularly associated with the *andevo* are also reflected in the funeral itself. No rituals. No publicity. No celebration. And most disturbingly, no signs of the intricate process of 'ancestralisation' which

is meant to ensure the 'spirit of the dead' may successfully join the ancestors. For this reason, landless migrants strongly believe that their deceased spread illness, misfortune and death within their families. No empirical evidence exists in support of the claim that *andevo* actually have more problems with infertility, miscarriages and infant mortality, nor that they fall ill more often than other villagers, or that they die younger.³⁸ They nevertheless cling as steadfastly to this belief as do the *tompon-tany*. The *andevo* themselves are convinced that these things occur because they lack tombs.

Socio-economic Subordination as Revenge of the Dead

Landholders with tombs often claimed that it was the malign spirits of the deceased *andevo* that were responsible for adversity in the village. Although they stated that these deceased generally take revenge on their own descendants, *hery* is also believed to be at the origin of broader socio-economic problems which have afflicted Marovato over the previous decades, such as drought and low rice production.

Tompon-tany rarely lost an occasion to assert that, without tombs, the *andevo* were 'lost people' who could not aspire to become ancestors. Having no ancestors means that the *andevo* do not benefit from ancestral *hasina*, vital energy, acquired in the interactive ritual exchange between the ancestors and the living, or on another level between seniors and juniors within families with tombs. And this absence of the flow of ancestral *hasina* was, after the negative influence of *hery* on their life, the second explanation provided by the *andevo* for their misfortune and – more generally – their socio-economic subordination.

Andevo defined themselves as human beings with very little *hasina* that they could never develop unless they created tombs and ancestors. The absence of ancestors and consequent deficiency in *hasina*, according to the *andevo*, was the principal reason why they were so 'different' from the *tompon-tany*, who preferred to express this in terms of inferiority. This is reflected in their discourse concerning funerals. *Andevo* often privately confessed that they were ashamed that they could not give their kinsfolk a funeral in the same manner as landholders with tombs. As Ratsimbazafy (see Appendix) said:

We are full of shame. We try to bury dead people as soon as we can. We hope that nobody will see where we bring them. We are not allowed to bury our dead people in the graveyard for the other migrants. They are the pure people. They are afraid that we will pollute the graveyard and that their ancestors will get upset about that. So, we have to find burial spots ourselves. I do not know where other people like us bury their dead. We never speak about it. That is how ashamed we are.

Tombs, Ancestors and Property Rights

The seeming fixity of *andevo* status within the social hierarchy, a position determined and reproduced by a lack of tombs and ancestors, raises a crucial question: why, if it might cause harm to the whole society (drought, low rice production), do *tompon-tany* continue to deprive the *andevo* of tombs? The *tompon-tany*, without exception, refused to address this issue, asserting vehemently that any such question was a sure sign the person asking was 'behaving as a foreigner'. They added that their ancestors wanted things this way. If they were not to follow their ancestors, revenge would be wreaked upon them in a form of *hery* even more powerful and harmful than the *hery* of deceased *andevo*.³⁹

Given that the current group of *tompon-tany* is likely of slave descent, how then could they have acquired their current ritual knowledge which seems so free-descent specific? Any inquiries directed towards the *tompon-tany* in this regard met with a familiar answer: 'It is just Malagasy tradition'. The latter hides another fear: that the landless *andevo* might themselves one day repeat this very process, and like the *tompon-tany* create their own portal to the hereafter, thereby transcending their current subordination. This is confirmed by an answer from Ratsimbazafy as to what he would do if one day he were able to acquire a tomb. He responded as follows:

I would look for an *ombiasy* first. He would then teach me how people become ancestors and then how I will have to please them. There are all kinds of things you have to do. But we do not know anything about that.

Graeber conducted research in a rural Merina community located approximately 40 km to the southeast of the capital of Antananarivo, where former slave families (called *olona mainty*, 'black people') had succeeded in buying land from the impoverished nobility, despite such a practice being allegedly prohibited by the ancestors [Graeber, 1996: 294]. Soon after they had acquired their land, *mainty* families often pooled their resources to build tombs. This occurred during the first two decades of the twentieth century [Graeber, 1996: 295]. Present-day owners of these tombs take great pride in keeping the tomb beautiful and they organise ancestral ceremonies more frequently than their noble neighbours.⁴⁰

Graeber's research demonstrates how previously certain slave-descent families managed to break out from their subordinate position as the excluded 'other' and thereby improve their socio-economic situation through the acquisition of tombs. Indeed, this might be the very route followed by those who currently call themselves *tompon-tany*. They, too, adhere scrupulously to

ceremonial protocol and also ensure that their tombs are well kept and constantly repaired. Similarly, they jealously maintain exclusivity agreements with traditional healers, whom they consult on a weekly basis as to how best to stay on good terms with the ancestors.

If possessing tombs and ancestors is a form of emancipation, a potential escape route from existing pariah status, then it is no wonder that 'masters of land' seek to block this exit by presenting both their own relatively elevated position and current *andevo* inequality as eternal, fixed and 'natural'. Witchcraft accusations against one *andevo* – Niaina – who made good economically, and who on this basis challenged the existing socio-economic order (a labourer who might obtain land and put a tomb on it) suggests the vulnerability of the *tompon-tany* in the face of a threat he represents to their control over property.⁴¹

WITCHCRAFT AND/AS SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUGGLE

In Merina and Betsileo society, non-agnates and non-kin are the main groups accused of witchcraft.⁴² Villagers in the Marovato region believe that particularly *andevo* are witches. Although they admitted that nothing prevented free descent people from becoming witches, *andevo* were seen as the more natural candidates.⁴³ Rafidy Andriana, the village head, explained why this was the case:

It is the *hery* again. The *andevo* cannot really help it.⁴⁴ It is the *hery* in the *ambiroa* of their dead people. They are upset that they cannot go to the other side because *andevo* do not have tombs. They show their discontent by making their descendants ill. And sometimes an *ambiroa* filled with *hery* from one of these dead people takes possession of the body of an *andevo*. Usually of close family. The person cannot resist this because they do not have sufficient *hasina*. That is why *tompon-tany* do not have any witches in their families. We have enough *hasina* in us to be protected against the *hery* if our ancestors get upset with us. But they won't get upset because we follow the Malagasy customs very strictly. We always please our ancestors. That is why we only get *hasina* from them. All the *andevo* get from their dead people is *hery*.⁴⁵

Rafidy Andriana describes witchcraft here as a form of possession.⁴⁶ In witchcraft, an individual is said to be taken over by a spirit filled with negative life force of a deceased person. The following two cases, involving Lalao and Niaina – *andevo* reputed to be witches by the Marovato villagers – indicate agency and meaning attributed to witchcraft.

Lalao and her husband Ratsimbazafy had improved their financial circumstances by 1996 (see also Appendix). Among other things, they had built their own house in Fenoarivo. According to the villagers, however, their improved circumstances were the result of Lalao having stolen garments (*lamba*) from her former employer. She had worked for him in the town of Ambalavao, 50 km to the north. This in itself was exceptional. Lalao and Niaina were the only *andevo* known to travel such long distances on a regular basis. Many people claimed that Lalao was a witch. The following description is taken from a 1996 fieldwork diary:

I often met Lalao at riverside where she washed her clothes. We generally limited our conversations to remarks on her children or the weather. During one of these discussions, she suddenly remarked: 'Do you remember that I told you the other day that people are jealous of me? That is because I do many things now that the pure people do. Look at my teeth.' She pulls her upper lip up with her right hand, proudly exhibiting the gold caps, a sign of beauty and status not usually reserved for the *andevo*. Lalao continues: 'People are so jealous that they now accuse me of all kinds of evil things.'

SE: Do not be upset with me, but I have even heard that they call you a witch.

Lalao smiles: Is that what they say now? Did they also tell you that I am dancing naked on the tombs at night? And that I am dangerous?

SE: Well, more or less.

Lalao: Fine. They won't bother me then. I can go wherever I want now. They will make sure to stay far away from me. I think I will go to the market in Ankaramena tomorrow. Maybe I will see you there.

On many occasions, I saw Lalao freely circulating in the Ankaramena market, a place that most other *andevo* generally avoided.

The behaviour of Niaina had changed since 1992, when he made a point of avoiding everybody, remaining in Western Marovato like other *andevo*. During his regular visits to Marovato in 1996, he made his presence known in a noisy and boisterous manner, crossing the village from north to south. Accusations that Niaina was a witch followed soon after an act of protest he committed which normally would be inconceivable for an *andevo*. Niaina, by definition, was a bit of a rebel, having married a free-descent woman. However, Niaina, being labelled *andevo*, was a casualty of the post-1992 *tompon-tany* plan to hire labourers.

Two personal tragedies followed soon after, which pushed Niaina from rebel to outlaw. Firstly, his stepsister was poisoned, which he blamed on the *tompon-tany*. Subsequently, Niaina's brother-in-law Dezy orchestrated the physical removal of his wife Ratsara from the marital home. Faced with this final humiliation, Niaina crossed his own social Rubicon. He burned down his house and that of his mother before moving to Fenoarivo where he had bought his way in (using profits he had earned selling hemp). This 1996 field diary entry illustrates Niaina's views about these events:

It was Rafidy Andriana who warned me not to socialise with Niaina: '*Mademoazely*, you have to be careful with him. You see, he is a witch. People might think that you are one as well.' On the following day, I saw Niaina. I alluded to the accusation without mentioning the accuser:

SE: Somebody told me that it is not good that I talk to you.

Niaina smiles: Yes, you know that by now. I am an *andevo*. Or did the person give you another reason?

SE: Yes, he said something about witchcraft.

This elicits a loud laugh from Niaina: Oh, is that what he said? Yes, then I guess you have to be careful.

SE: What is so dangerous about you then?

Niaina: I am not sure myself. All I know is that witches are dangerous. They work with *hery*.

SE: How do they do this?

Niaina: They do not like people with tombs. So I guess I am one then.

He laughs again. While laughing he turns around and observes Rafidy Andriana watching from the balcony of his house. 'Was the person you spoke with Rafidy Andriana by any chance?' He turns and walks away without taking his leave, still laughing to himself.

Villagers propagated numerous myths concerning the behaviour of witches. Niaina and Lalao were rumoured to circulate at night, naked, dancing on tombs.⁴⁷ Witches and *andevo* frequently merged in the public imagination, as both represent the profane and both allegedly channel the evil of *hery*.⁴⁸ In this sense, they personify the antithesis of *tompon-tany* values. However, whereas the *andevo* seemed to adhere to the social role that the *tompon-tany* had devised for them, witches mocked the social system by desecrating tombs, the nexus of socio-cultural life.⁴⁹ It is not surprising that Niaina and Lalao were accused of witchcraft as soon as they rejected their *andevo* role.⁵⁰

Every *andevo* was viewed as a potential witch. The *andevo* themselves feared becoming witches if the *hery* in the *ambiroa* of one of their deceased took over their body. Although there was no tangible evidence of the existence of witchcraft in Marovato, *tompon-tany* and migrants in the eastern quarter (those who have their tombs elsewhere) unquestionably believed in it and feared it. Parents spoke to children about witchcraft, often with the intent of transmitting implied messages on ideal social behaviour. Children were warned of the evil of witchcraft. For example, the rumour that witches dance on tombs may be said implicitly to reinforce the sacredness of the tomb. In a similar manner, 'andevoness' was employed in day-to-day village life as a negative counterpoint to the proper observation of 'Malagasy customs'.

There is a clear pattern to the fact of witchcraft accusation and the kinds of 'from below' behaviour that elicits this. Both Niaina and Lalao were *andevo* and witches. By wearing the cloak of 'andevoness', indeed, by embracing the negative labels imposed upon them by the *tompon-tany* and by 'becoming' witches, they have succeeded in gaining a certain freedom within the narrow confines of their pre-defined social role as poor, submissive and self-conscious *andevo*. They were, in a word, dangerous and – from the *tompon-tany* point of view – threatening.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Because they have no tombs, *andevo* are defined as people without history, without ancestors and without descent groups. They are believed to be an 'impure' people who possess little *hasina* and who cannot control the force of *hery*. The sum of these negative qualities may be referred to as 'andevoness', although the term 'andevoness' is not explicitly employed by the villagers. Nor does it appear anywhere in the literature on Madagascar. Nevertheless, its determining features appeared in day-to-day *tompon-tany* discourse and had real consequences for the people called *andevo*. The set of attributes posited as the theory of 'andevoness' reflects the position of the *andevo* in a specific time and place, being the Marovato region.⁵¹ It is an expression of what the *tompon-tany* are not. 'Andevoness' represents what the *tompon-tany* are no longer.

Despite the lapse of more than a century since the abolition of slavery, social, economic and cultural relations in Marovato appear to be grounded in the memory of slavery and the exclusion of slaves from principal cultural components such as tombs, ancestors and kinship. The emancipation of slaves in 1896 did nothing to resolve their economic and socio-cultural dilemma, freeing them in name only. As it proposed no substitute system, the net effect was simply to decouple slaves from their environment, without

providing them any useful reference, *other than the past*, to commence their new life. During the period of slavery and its aftermath of emancipation, the *tompon-tany* experienced a radical and traumatic rupture, departure and separation from their place of origin. Thus, the *tompon-tany*, who ceaselessly reiterate that 'history' and 'Malagasy customs' are of their essence, are unable to trace their family histories back further than one generation.

They did, however, preserve a powerful sense of themselves as a people, apparently by internalising their cultural history, and preserving the memory of tombs, kinship and ancestors. The *tompon-tany* fear nothing more than being 'lost' people or people 'without history', an anxiety consistent with possible slave descent. In one sense, therefore, the *tompon-tany* need to accentuate and perpetuate the features of 'andevoness' appears to be borne of the precariousness of their own recent past. This exclusion, it is suggested, may be due to the slave origins of the *tompon-tany* themselves. Thus, the ideological 'otherness' of *andevo* status was for the *tompon-tany* a technique for survival.

The prohibition against *andevo* establishing tombs meant that in Marovato society they were unable to create ancestors or extended kinship groups, conditions whose very existence depend upon being anchored in space and time by tombs. Such religious exclusion was, in effect, a proxy war between those who control the land and those who were initially tenants (with usufruct rights), evicted after 1996 and replaced with landless migrants who possessed no rights to the land they worked. Property rights that the 'masters of land' enjoyed in the period up to the 1960s came increasingly under pressure thereafter, as successive waves of migrants arrived in the Southern Highlands. In the early 1990s, land was leased out to them, and they became tenants, but by 1996 new arrivals made it possible for the 'masters of land' to employ workers who have no rights to land. At the same time the leased land of the *andevo* was repossessed while the migrants in eastern Marovato were allowed to continue their lease agreements with the *tompon-tany*.

This is a politically volatile situation, and a familiar one in many parts of the so-called Third World (Brazil, Mexico, India) where neoliberal government policies have resulted in a return to the land by the unemployed. Incumbent President Ravalomanana has made land registration, under pressure by the IMF, one of the platforms of his political campaign for the presidential elections in December 2006. This development alone represents a fundamental challenge to the authority of elites such as the *tompon-tany* and their right to arbitrate land matters. In the ideological arena, there are reports now of religious movements who recruit in the region. This might mark the beginning of a mutating ideological framework which in the long term might infuse *andevo*, or even *tompon-tany* for that matter, with the animus for change or upheaval of 'Malagasy customs'.

The connection between recent economic policy in Madagascar and the ideological significance allocated to ancestors, tombs and funerals is simply stated. An effect of unemployment and poverty was migration into the region between Ambalavao and Ankaramena, which in turn put pressure on land which – although under control of the ‘masters of land’ – had not been formally registered in terms of ownership. Hence arguments concerning the importance of ancestors and tombs advanced by those who controlled this resource without owning it can be said to be an ideological proxy for claims to land. It is a truism that rights to territory are defined in terms of historical longevity. That is, a particular locality was long ago settled by people who lived, farmed, worked, married, had children, and died there. As a result, a common set of cultural practices emerged, including not just language and institutions, but also religion.

In many different rural areas of the so-called Third World, at many different periods, this kind of argument has been deployed against later waves of migrants arriving in settled areas – that they have no cultural roots in the context to which they come, and for this reason are ‘different’ (= ‘other’). Both oral tradition and historiography perform the same discursive role: each defines identity, and then indicates why its bearers are ‘different’. These are the kinds of argument encountered here, where first comers’ claims about land rights are invoked with reference to ancestors. By virtue of this connection, the resources in the location concerned are claimed, even when no formal property rights have been granted or recognised by the state.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ambiroa</i> | literally ‘body double’, or the spirit of a deceased person |
| <i>andevo</i> | slave(s) or being of slave descent |
| <i>andriana</i> | those who claim to be of noble descent: in Betsileo mythology those who are believed to reincarnate into crocodiles |
| <i>fady</i> | forbidden, taboo |
| <i>fanafody gasy</i> | Malagasy medicine(s), a euphemism for sorcery |
| <i>fandevenana</i> | funeral |
| <i>fasana</i> | tomb |
| <i>fiefana</i> | literally, the completion of a funeral: a ritual to mark the end of the mourning period |
| <i>fomba gasy</i> | Malagasy customs |
| <i>fomba vazaha</i> | foreign customs |

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>hasina</i> | life force, vital energy |
| <i>henatra</i> | shame |
| <i>hery</i> | power or energy, often seen as destructive. |
| <i>hova</i> | person who claims to be of noble descent in Betsileo society; Betsileo <i>hova</i> are believed not to reincarnate into crocodiles; commoner descent in Merina society |
| <i>lamba</i> | cloth |
| <i>mademoazely</i> | Miss, or Ms. |
| <i>radio</i> | clean or pure |
| <i>mainy</i> | black |
| <i>maloto</i> | dirty or impure |
| <i>mosavy</i> | witchcraft |
| <i>mpamosavy</i> | witch |
| <i>mpiavy</i> | migrant(s) |
| <i>mpikarama</i> | labourer(s) |
| <i>ody</i> | amulet(s) |
| <i>olompotsy</i> | person of commoner descent |
| <i>olona radio</i> | clean or pure person or people; a designation in Betsileo society for people who have 'proven' their free descent by pointing out their family tomb |
| <i>olona mainy</i> | black people |
| <i>olona maloto</i> | dirty or impure person or people; description in Betsileo society of those who cannot demonstrate their free descent by means of a family tomb: such people are considered to be of slave descent |
| <i>ombiasy</i> | traditional healer |
| <i>rafeta</i> | flat stone blocking the entrance of the tomb |
| <i>ray aman-dreny</i> | parents, literally fathers-and-mothers |
| <i>razana</i> | ancestor(s), dead person or corpse |
| <i>saotsa</i> | blessing, thanks; expression of gratitude to the ancestors |
| <i>tanin-drazana</i> | ancestral land |
| <i>tantara</i> | a history, a tale, a legend, a fabulous narration |
| <i>tavy</i> | slash-and-burn agriculture |
| <i>toets'ambiroa</i> | ritual of separation |
| <i>tompon-tany</i> | master(s) of the land |
| <i>trano</i> | house or box |
| <i>tromba</i> | possession |
| <i>tsodrano</i> | blowing of the water |
| <i>tsy radio</i> | impure, not clean |
| <i>vazaha</i> | foreigner |
| <i>very</i> | lost |

NOTES

- 1 By the end of the 1980s, popular opposition to President Didier Ratsiraka gathered momentum. Ratsiraka had ruled the country since 1975 under a highly centralised government outwardly committed to the tenets of revolutionary socialism. In 1989, protests were a daily occurrence in the capital city of Antananarivo, and chronic work stoppages by public officers paralysed the country for months on end. However, it took until 1992 for the opposition to sufficiently unite and force presidential elections. In the first round of the 1992 elections, opposition candidate Albert Zafy tolled 45% of the vote to Ratsiraka's 29%. Zafy easily defeated Ratsiraka in the second round of elections which were held in February 1993. President Zafy's short-lived mandate came to an end with his impeachment in 1996. In 1997, new presidential elections were held. With 50.7% of the vote, Didier Ratsiraka was re-elected President. For an overview of the political processes and events in the 1990s see Roubaud [2000].
- 2 Any data concerning Madagascar should be viewed as estimates, given the difficulty of obtaining correct information. Most studies focus on cash income, which also might lead to misleading figures, particularly with respect to the countryside.
- 3 Data from a census of the Malagasy population, carried out in August 1993 by the Malagasy National Institute of Statistics (*Direction de la Démographie*). In 1998, the population was estimated to be 14 million [IMF, 1999: 3].
- 4 Industry accounts for only 13% of GDP, while services – particularly those linked to tourism (especially eco-tourism) – accounts for 55%.
- 5 For both chronological and methodological reasons, the research falls into two periods, the first from 1989 until 1992 and the second from 1996 to 1999. Throughout the initial phase ending in 1992, a mainly socio-economic approach was followed. Upon return to the region in 1996, villagers thought that I was sufficiently 'behaving Betsileo' (*mitondra tena Betsileo ianao*) to be allowed to participate in events that were of cultural import. Most relevant in this respect were the funerals and their accompanying rituals.
- 6 The concept of *tompon-tany* is known throughout Madagascar. It is translated as 'master(s) of the land' and not 'owner(s) of the land' because, despite the fact that their claim to land is considered legitimate by all villagers, they do not have registered titles.
- 7 Kinship groups are organised around the tomb. Communal rituals related to the ancestors perpetually strengthen their family bonds.
- 8 In reality, this land only became 'ancestral land' (*tanin-drazana*) by virtue of a *razana* being placed in the tomb. *Razana* means both 'ancestor' and 'dead person' or 'corpse' [Bloch, 1971: 112]. Those calling themselves *tompon-tany* say that they never relocated an ancestor from elsewhere with the object of making their present holdings ancestral, but simply waited until a family member died. This is noteworthy, as it does not comply with the common practice in the highlands of transferring at least one corpse from the old to the new tomb whenever a new tomb is erected. This also is consistent with the hypothesis that those who currently claim the status of *tompon-tany* are actually of slave descent and did not have tombs.
- 9 Research attempts were made to verify whether the migrants who became *tompon-tany* were actually of free descent. Most of those interviewed were willing to disclose their place of origin. Follow-up inquiries involved visiting seven villages which were claimed to be the ancestral lands of seven *tompon-tany* families in the region. A certain number of family members indeed lived there, but it was difficult to conclusively determine whether the villages were in fact their ancestral homelands. Often these relatives admitted that they also were migrants, who had themselves only recently become *tompon-tany* by establishing a family tomb on their newly acquired land. Unsurprisingly, people with tombs were not reluctant to discuss their family tomb. Indeed, the tomb was a source of pride and an opportunity to showcase their social status. In the *tantara* ('tale' or '(hi)story') about their lives, the tomb generally constituted the point of departure. People of slave descent, however, skirted the topic of ancestral lands and tombs, which might reveal either the absence of a tomb or its recent pedigree. Most slaves lost their tombs upon enslavement. Slaves were

- prohibited from having permanent tombs throughout the period of slavery. They were forced to bury their dead in perishable tombs [Bloch, 1971: 136].
- 10 To protect the identity of the villagers, place names and names of individuals are pseudonyms.
 - 11 The claim by these migrants to be Betsileo is accepted by the *tompon-tany* at face value, whereas their social origin within the Betsileo group is subject to question, requiring a further inquiry into whether their ancestral lands and family tombs are really in the Southern Highlands.
 - 12 Marovato is a migrant village and used here as a case. 36.2% of its population has settled since 1970. They are called *mpiavy* ('migrants') because they do not have family tombs in the region. Subsequently, six more migrant villages in the Marovato region were encountered. The Marovato region includes these and other villages located within a 15 km radius of Marovato.
 - 13 The *tompon-tany* village council functions next to the formal *fokon-tany* council. Marovato has one representative in this assembly, who with four members from two neighbouring villages, constitutes the council. The Marovato representative is appointed by the *tompon-tany* council. Generally, *tompon-tany* choose one of their relatives. The *fokon-tany* delegates represent the national government at the local level. They do not interfere with the *tompon-tany* settlement policy. In practice, *fokon-tany* councils were found to be passive entities. Its members only held meetings a few times per year.
 - 14 Labels such as *tompon-tany* or *andevo* do not necessarily refer to historical realities. 'Free descent' is legitimised through acquisition of a tomb, however recent. In the same manner, one is '*andevo*' by virtue of being tombless. Nothing physically distinguishes the *andevo* from the other villagers.
 - 15 Bloch [1980: 120] writes on this issue: 'Without an ancestral homeland one was a non-person.' Over the last few decades, the *tompon-tany* have only allowed migrants presumed to be of slave origin to settle in Marovato if they agree to live in the Western periphery. Migrants of free origin may locate in the Eastern part of the village. This would appear to be a general phenomenon in the Marovato region, six Betsileo villages other than Marovato having similar East-West configurations. Kottak [1980: 137–8] also refers to this practice in his study on Betsileo villages around Ambalavao. Dwelling in Western Marovato automatically entails being deemed by other villagers to be a member of an inferior group. Generally, Betsileo ideology considers the West to be the least favourable ritual location [Kottak, 1980: 137–41]. In Marovato, land in the Western quarter is openly seen as impure. No Betsileo of free descent would consider living in the Western periphery. Those who dwell in Western Marovato are referred to as *andevo*. People with tombs designate them as *olona maloto* ('impure' or 'dirty people'), whereas they call themselves *olona madio* ('pure' or 'clean people').
 - 16 Commonly slave descent of one of the marriage partners was only established after the union and the birth of children (who are seen as 'impure'). *Tompon-tany* would force the marriage to be dissolved after such a discovery.
 - 17 The agrarian history of Madagascar is the focus of work by Stephen Ellis [1985] and, more recently, Gwyn Campbell [2005].
 - 18 When compared to other villagers, landless *andevo* exhibit a number of different behavioural traits. For example, unlike other villagers, none of them ever shook hands. They also seemed to suffer from 'amnesia' when asked about their place of origin.
 - 19 In his book on Betsileo villages near Ambalavao, Kottak observes that *andevo* there are also prohibited from buying land. *Tompon-tany* only allow them to rent land. Usufruct rights are passed on from father to son but the *tompon-tany* can reclaim the land whenever he feels like it. This is also the case in Marovato. In addition, Kottak concludes that *andevo* generally cultivate 0.45 hectare per holding whereas *tompon-tany* exploit more than twice that (1.2 hectares per holding). Kottak also states that this quantity of land – no more than 0.45 of a hectare – is insufficient to support the *andevo* [Kottak, 1980: 135, 163].
 - 20 '*Ireo razana dia antoka ho ahy fa izao no fomba gasy. Koa raha maty koa aho dia antoka ho an'ireo zanako hiaina ny fomba gasy thany koa.*'

- 21 In 1996, Marovato had 631 inhabitants, of whom 314 classified themselves as *tompon-tany*, 151 as migrants (of whom 31 were referred to as *andevo*), and 166 as labourers or *mpikarama* (for a further discussion of the *mpikarama* see also Evers [2002]).
- 22 This also is the case with those *mpikarama* who are not actually related to the *tompon-tany* family head. 'Kinship metaphors' can be found throughout Madagascar [Bloch, 1973, 1989; Middleton, 1988].
- 23 In effect, less *tompon-tany* land lay fallow after the entry of the *mpikarama* in Marovato. In 1992, the *tompon-tany* held 143.6 hectares of farm land, of which 32.8 hectares was leased out and 41 hectares lay fallow. In 1996, the area of the *tompon-tany* land had remained the same but now they leased out less, namely 28.3 hectares, while only 18 hectares lay fallow. The fact that in 1996 they cultivated more land the *tompon-tany* attributed to the arrival of the *mpikarama*. Under the new system, *tompon-tany* produced more manioc, but because of difficulties in finding buyers for this crop, their income did not increase significantly.
- 24 For details about the *andevo* who left the village see Evers [1997, 2002].
- 25 '*mitondra tena Betsileo ianao*' translates as 'behaving Betsileo', but was phrased in various manners, and often included the qualifiers *tahaka* or *toy*, meaning behaving 'like' a Betsileo.
- 26 For the constituent elements of culture, see Keesing [1981: 364–5, 509].
- 27 The architecture of the tombs is uniform. The materials used in the cube-shaped, top portion of the tombs, visible from above-ground, are stones which are hauled from rock quarries and cut into forms sufficiently flat and small for the walls of the structure. A larger square slab of stone, supported by four columns, serves as the roof. Horns of zebu sacrificed to the ancestors during the funerals are placed on top of the tombs. The portals of the tombs are usually constructed of hardwood (often from *merana* or *nato* trees). Some tombs use the more traditional *rafeta*, a massive flat stone, as the entrance door. The tombs measure approximately 2½ m wide, 4 m in length and 2 m high. The tombs are generally divided into three parts: a *vazohon-kady* (small entrance and gallery) which leads inside the tomb, the underground *hady* (burial vault where the corpses are placed), and the *aloalo*, or upper cube-shaped construction. For more detailed information on the physical construction of Betsileo tombs, see Rajaonarimanana [1979: 181–93] and Dubois [1938: 666–79].
- 28 The first stage is the funeral itself (*fandevenana*), where the spirit (*ambiroa*) of the deceased should enter the tomb. Second comes the ritual of separation (*toets'ambiroa*), through which villagers lead the *ambiroa* further on its way to the ancestors. Last comes the ritual *fiefana*, a feast at the end of the mourning period, which marks the final integration of the *ambiroa* of the deceased into the general category of the ancestors (*razana*). The concept of *ambiroa* has received relatively little attention from those who study Madagascar. Abinal [1885: 211–12] and Dubois [1938: 729] trace the etymology of the word *ambiroa* to meanings such as 'being two', 'the body double' and 'the surplus of two'. The *ambiroa* leaves the body upon death.
- 29 For comparative material on Highland funerals, see Bloch [1999: 211–31], Decary [1962], Dubois [1938], Edholm [1971], Kottak [1980], Rahamefy [1997], Rajaonarimanana [1979: 181–93], and Razafintsalama [1983: 193–209].
- 30 Southall [1986: 414] translates *hasina* as 'sacred ritual potency'. He considers it to be a central tenet held by all groups in Madagascar: 'Here is one of those pervasive themes which justify emphasis on the essential unity of all Malagasy culture, despite its apparent regional contrasts.' Bloch [1989: 65] also writes that the notion of *hasina* is the 'kernel of Malagasy thought'. For eschatological aspects and the ontology of the Malagasy: Bloch [1971], Cole [2001], Dubois [1978], Heurtebize [1997], Lambek [1993], Mangalaza [1998], Molet [1979], Ottino [1998], Rahamefy [1997], Rainihifina [1958–61], Rakotomalala [2001], Thomas [1996; 1997].
- 31 The concept of *hery* is highly ambiguous for the Malagasy. *Hery* commonly means strength and is neither positive nor negative but neutral. It is regarded as a good thing only if one can control it [Bloch, 1989: 65]. *Delivré*, however, describes *hery* more in negative terms, as informants in the Marovato area do. He writes [Delivré, 1967: 188]: 'La signification du *hasina* dépend donc essentiellement de l'utilisation qu'on en fait: cette puissance n'est bénéfique que lorsque les rapports hiérarchiques entre certains être ... sont soigneusement sauvegardés. Mais si ces rapports sont inversés et que le *hasina* est détourné de sa fin propre,

- il devient accidentellement une force du mal, et on emploie de préférence le terme “hery” pour le qualifier.’
- 32 The traditional healers (*ombiasy*) and their working methods are worthy of a separate study and beyond the scope of this article. It is nevertheless significant that the *tompon-tany* depend so heavily upon their *ombiasy*, who they believe have superior *hasina* to all other living beings. The *ombiasy* also interpret the wishes of the ancestors and ensure that rituals are executed according to ‘Malagasy customs’. They act as intermediaries between the living and the dead. *Ombiasy* have the knowledge to manipulate *hasina* and *hery* to perform sorcery (called ‘Malagasy medicine(s)’, *fanafody gasy*). ‘Malagasy medicines’ are usually amulets (*ody*) composed of herbs, roots, grains and leaves which are infused with ancestral *hery* by the *ombiasy*. *Tompon-tany* rely on their *ombiasy* to use sorcery as an instrument of power or to avenge wrongs.
 - 33 The fact that kinship groups [Bloch, 1989: 66] possess differing degrees of *hasina* ‘is not the result of their achievement but is given in their nature. The concern of the *hasina* holders should be to preserve it; creating *hasina* is out of the question.’ In other words, *hasina* is reproduced through endogamy.
 - 34 Rasolomanana [1997: 333], working on the Northern Betsileo, also observes that *andevo* are not allowed to participate in funerals of free descent people. He writes: ‘une femme “*tsy madio*” (ayant du sang *andevo*) qui voulait à tout prix s’intégrer dans le groupe des descendants s’acheminant vers le tombeau ancestral, a été enlevée par un tourbillon subit, pour ne plus être retrouvée!’ Unfortunately, he provides no further details on this issue [Rasoamampionona, 2000: 369–75].
 - 35 Bloch also discusses *hasina* as a source of legitimate or traditional authority. He postulates [1989: 64–5] that each deme (local kin group) of Merina society possesses *hasina* which corresponds to their rank in the socio-political hierarchy. Bloch makes a division between what he calls *hasina* mark I and mark II. By *hasina* mark I, he refers to the supernatural virtue that is possessed in differing degrees by all living beings and whose ‘innate religious superiority’ was concentrated in the Merina king. The *hasina* and authority of the king was presumably unchallenged, bestowed and sacred. *Hasina* mark II refers to the recognition of that *hasina*, i.e. the practice of inferiors rendering homage to superiors. *Hasina* mark I is a supernatural essence, an innate religious *state* of superiority, which flows in the form of fertility from the superior to the inferiors, whereas *hasina* mark II is a natural *action*, manifested by the giving of gifts, respect and honour, flowing upwards [Bloch, 1989: 67–8]. Several authors have drawn parallels between the political component of *hasina* and the concept of ‘honour’ in English. Superiors might possess honour but only provided they continue to be honoured by inferiors [Bloch, 1989: 66; Kottak, 1980: 70]. Historically, the Merina king infused his subjects with *hasina* through the ritual of the royal bath [see Bloch 1986: 43–7]. In turn, his subjects rendered homage to the king by giving him the symbolic gift of an uncut silver coin, also called *hasina* [Callet, 1908: 663–5; *Delivré*, 1967: 186, *Molet*, 1956]. The replication of this interaction between king and subjects was performed within each kin group through the ritual of *tsodrano*. This means the ‘blowing of the water’. In this ritual the elder sprays junior family members with water from a saucer he holds before his lips [Bloch, 1989: 68]. In the Marovato region, this practice is still engaged in by ‘free descent’ fathers for their children. As a father’s *hasina* exceeded that of his sons, the rite was performed by elders for their juniors as a form of blessing for fertility and success. The juniors in turn respected and honoured the elders in order not to be deprived of *hasina*.
 - 36 Even young unmarried girls of *tompon-tany* families receive a proper burial in accordance with the *tompon-tany* burial practice.
 - 37 Villagers often compared the impurity of an *andevo* to that of a dog. This metaphor is common to other Malagasy groups as, for example, the Merina [Ramamonjisoa, 1984: 66] and the Sakalava [Goedefroit, 1998: 117]. The Antemoro refer to the Antevolo, the lowest group in their social hierarchy, in similar terms [Beaujard, 1983: 160; Deschamps/Vianès, 1959: 49].
 - 38 This kind of statistical data is virtually impossible to gather, due to the *andevo* reluctance to even be identified as a group.

- 39 Even *hasina* of the ancestors can change into *hery*. This is said to occur when people of free descent violate 'Malagasy customs'.
- 40 As Graeber [1996: 373] states: 'The beauty of the tombs is thus visible evidence of incessant ritual activity, which has transformed the hill into a shining display of the newfound power and prosperity of Betafo's *mainity*. Certainly the *andriana* themselves have nothing like this. Besides them, even the tombs in the very center of Betafo, the most prestigious noble tombs, looked shabby and unkempt.'
- 41 The act of witchcraft is called *mosavy*. The word *mpamosavy* refers to the person, a witch.
- 42 Kottak [1980: 175] states that: 'Within a primarily agnatic village there is a socially recognized difference between the children of sons and those of daughters. Agnates express their hostility to nonagnates, most commonly by leveling accusations of witchcraft against them'. Bloch [1971: 67] goes even further and claims that among the Merina most accusations of witchcraft are typically between unrelated people. In the Marovato region also involve accusations of witchcraft that are principally, but not exclusively, between unrelated people.
- 43 Ramamonjisoa [1984: 51] stresses that, among the Merina, the *mainity* (literally 'black people', the term connotes slave descent) are more closely associated with witchcraft: 'Ces pratiques en fait sont communes aux deux groupes, mais à des degrés différents: exceptionnelles chez les hova ['people of commoner descent'], elles sont plus généralisées chez les *mainity*.'
- 44 Villagers think that witches might harm others unintentionally whereas sorcerers are seen as conscious agents (for parallels with Africa, see Evans-Pritchard [1987], Middleton and Winter [1963], and Douglas [1970]).
- 45 Ramamonjisoa [1984: 51] postulates that free descent people believe the *mainity* are unable to resist the forces of the occult: 'inférieurs sociaux que l'on dit ne pas avoir résisté à la force des charmes qu'ils manipulent et qui les domineraient.' Here, it seems that the occult power that some *mainity* are supposed to manipulate is derived from charms or amulets (*ody*). This is not the case for the *andevo* who have no access to these *ody* as they are not allowed to see the 'traditional healers' (*ombiasy*).
- 46 People with tombs can also become possessed by the *ambiroa* of deceased royalty. This form of possession, called *tromba*, is seen as a positive phenomenon. When somebody is possessed, he or she makes gestures which remind people of the late king or prince who is manifesting himself through the possessed person. Possession endows the possessed with healing powers. Villagers say that it is the *hasina* in the *ambiroa* of the nobleman that is at the disposal of the possessed for the duration of the possession. They believe that the possessed person only has to touch ill people in order to cure them [Estrade, 1977; Jaovelo-Dzao, 1996; Sharp, 1993]. No such possessions were observed in Marovato. Conceptually, witchcraft might be viewed as the counterpart of *tromba*. In witchcraft, the *ambiroa* of a deceased person also possesses somebody, but instead of being filled with *hasina* it is filled with *hery*.
- 47 On Malagasy witchcraft, see Bloch [1971: 65–8], Danielli [1974: 261–76], Dubois [1938: 907–11], Feeley-Harnik [1978: 410], Gardenier [1986: 337–52], Graeber [1996: 416–39], Grandidier [1920: 476–8], Kottak [1980: 212, 215–7], and Lambek [1993].
- 48 The witch is 'l'indésirable par excellence' [Dubois, 1938: 908], a position similar to that of the *andevo*. And just like the *andevo* who managed to get married to people with tombs, witches also are not allowed to enter the tomb [Callet, 1908: 273; Dubois, 1938: 679–80].
- 49 The discourse about witches as described by Kottak [1980: 212] for the Betsileo in the Ambalavao region is very similar to what was observed in Marovato. He states that people view witchcraft as the dark side of *hasina* ('beneficial occult energy'), and as such can be seen as the systematic inversion of Betsileo ceremonial life: 'However, the Betsileo also must deal with the dark side of the force, the occult powers controlled by sorcerers and witches, people who mock the social order by using its most potent symbols (e.g. food and tomb, major symbols of kinship) in inappropriate contexts.'
- 50 Because villagers believe that witches are possessed by *hery*, they fear witches can spread illness or death by a mere touch or look. *Tompon-tany* often stated that they possess sufficient *hasina* to repel *hery* attacks, but prefer the path of prudence by keeping at a safe distance from witches. For children, even those of *tompon-tany* families, witches present a bigger

danger, because their *hasina* is undeveloped. Most parents provided their children with amulets filled with ancestral *hasina*, which were fashioned by a traditional healer. When a person is believed to be the victim of witchcraft, the *ombiasy* would also prepare an amulet to neutralise the *hery* afflicting the victim.

- 51 This raises the question as to whether 'andevoness' exists in other parts of Madagascar, on which see Evers [2002] and Rakoto [1997; 2000].

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APPENDIX: A BURIAL

Presented here is the description of an *andevo* funeral, as recorded in my 1996 fieldwork diary. Over the ten years of fieldwork conducted in Madagascar, only one *andevo* funeral was witnessed. It was held for Soanirina, who died on 27 August 1996 [Evers, 2002], within minutes of giving birth to her first child, a baby girl. Soanirina's parents stated that she was only ten years of age when she died, although circumstances would indicate that she was older. Her two older sisters, Raozy and Fara, lived in the

same dwelling as me in 1992. Prior to my return in 1996, Raozy married Lahy, and Fara returned to dwell with me again.

It is about eleven at night when I hear a loud knock on my door. Raozy enters the hut and announces:

‘I have come to take my sister to my parents in Fenoarivo. They need our help.’

When I ask her why, she responds by asking to borrow my flashlight, stating hers has run out of batteries. Fenoarivo is about two kilometres from Marovato, and I do not want to send the girls off by themselves. I insist on coming with them.

Just before midnight, we arrive at the house of the girls’ parents, Ratsimbazafy and Lalao.

Ratsimbazafy opens the door. Although he seems surprised to see me, he motions to follow him inside. In the main room, Lalao is holding a new-born baby completely swathed in a cloth. Five of her children, including Voahangy (a Marovato resident) and an equal number of grandchildren, are gathered around her, seated on the floor. Soanirina is noticeably absent. I presume the child is hers, as several days previously I had met her and she was obviously in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Everyone in the room stares mutely at the baby. After a long time, Ratsimbazafy breaks the silence:

‘Soanirina is dead. She is in the other room. We will bury her tonight.’

Ratsimbazafy invites me to follow him. Raozy and Fara accompany us into the second room of the house. Soanirina has been placed on a grass mat in the corner of the room, just behind the partition. Her body and head are wrapped in a cotton cloth, her face still visible, her eyes closed. A wooden stretcher made of branches leans against the wall. Otherwise the room is empty.

Ratsimbazafy: ‘We will bring her to the mountains now. You can come if you want.’

Lalao orders Fara to stay with the baby and the children. Ratsimbazafy and Lalao place the corpse on a poor quality, makeshift stretcher,

presumably fabricated just prior to our arrival. Not a word is spoken to Soanirina, contrary to the practice to which I was accustomed during funerals of free descent villagers.

The funeral cortege consists of Soanirina's parents, Voahangy, Raozy and myself. We depart from the village of Fenoarivo in silence. Raozy leads the way with her father's flashlight. Ratsimbazafy and Lalao follow, holding the stretcher with the corpse. Ratsimbazafy carries the front of the stretcher. Despite the dark, Ratsimbazafy and Lalao proceed with haste. I am forced to run in order to keep up and not lose my way. Voahangy immediately precedes me, carrying a second flashlight. Under the dim light of a crescent moon, it is impossible to see what lies ahead.

We bypass the Marovato migrant graveyard, where migrants who have their tombs elsewhere inter their dead pending the eventual transport of the deceased back home. Then we continue climbing into the lower hills of the Ifaha mountain range. It is a very difficult walk, and from time to time Lalao and Ratsimbazafy each lose their footing, almost causing the body to fall off the stretcher. After more than an hour, we reach the peak. Ratsimbazafy continues to the other side and descends a gravelled incline leading to the eastern slope. After another ten minute walk, Ratsimbazafy stops:

'This is a good spot.'

Nothing marks the spot but a small sapling. There are no signs of graves or other distinguishing features of a burial ground. He calls for the spade that Voahangy has been carrying. We stand by, and watch in silence while he digs a hole. He waves Lalao forward to help him lower both corpse and stretcher into the grave. There are no blessings, no incantations, no instructions, no goodbyes. Having lowered Soanirina into the grave, Lalao retreats several steps, her face expressionless. Ratsimbazafy quickly shovels dirt onto the body. Lalao pulls her *lamba* tighter to protect herself against the cold night air of the mountain. Her face is barely visible. When Ratsimbazafy has almost covered the body, Lalao, Raozy and Voahangy turn away and gather stones. Raozy tells me to assist them. Once collected, the stones are placed over the grave.

'So the dogs won't find her,' Ratsimbazafy explains.

Within half an hour of our arrival, we depart and return to Fenoarivo.

Fara is waiting when we enter the house. Soanirina's baby is asleep, as are the other children, who lie on grass mats spread around the room. Fara hands the baby back to Lalao and informs her that she will be returning to Marovato with me. It is early in the morning when Fara, Voahangy, Raozy and I arrive back in Marovato. We resume our tasks of the day. Never again did I hear the name Soanirina mentioned.